

Contact:
Phone: 1-877-JTB-NEWS
E-mail: JTBnews@ruderfinn.com

THE GENIUS OF DESIGN IN JAMAICA

Jamaica's extraordinary physical beauty is a natural catalyst for artistic creativity, and the fusion of so many cultures in one nation has brought together an enormous range of influences on design and style. Visitors to the island quickly observe a remarkable flair in many areas, among them architecture, interior design, landscaping and fashion.

ARCHITECTURE

Drawing on the heritage of early European settlers, Jamaica's architectural style reflects both Spanish and English influences. There are many interesting areas, as well as individual buildings, to explore.

Jamaica's former capital, **Spanish Town** has one of the finest Georgian squares in the world and an example of enduring style. Settled by the Spaniards in 1534 and named *Villa de la Vega* (meaning *city on the plains*), the town was destroyed in 1655 by the English, who later rebuilt it using the original Spanish layout. The town was renamed *St. Jago de la Vega*.

In a characteristic Spanish colonial layout, four stately buildings surround a central garden. Rodney Memorial stands on the northern side of the square. On the west is the facade of King's House, once a magnificent mansion, with the Governor's stables. These are the only buildings

of the compound still intact. They now house the Jamaican People's Museum of Craft and Technology. Flanking the eastern edge of the square is the old House of Assembly, now serving as home to the St. Catherine Parish Council offices. The courthouse on the south of the square burned down in the 1980's, leaving just the skeleton of the building.

Also worth a visit in Spanish Town are the Anglican Church, the oldest of its kind in the Western hemisphere, and the Spanish Town Iron Bridge, the oldest cast-iron bridge in the Caribbean.

Rose Hall Great House in Montego Bay is the most famous great house in Jamaica. Designed in the Georgian style, the three-story house was built in the 1770's by a rich plantation owner named John Palmer. Once the setting for the most lavish parties on the island, Rose Hall sits atop a hill overlooking the ocean and the Rose Hall area, with extensive grounds of lush flora. Inside, a wide mahogany staircase leads up to the bedrooms, where the notorious Annie Palmer reputedly murdered three husbands before losing her life violently to a vengeful lover. Sightings of her ghost are frequently reported, and the mystery of Rose Hall Great House remains forever an enigma with tremendous appeal to feature film and television crews. It is also a favored venue for banquets and weddings, and a bold choice for the fearless.

Additional venues of interest include: **the Barrett House**, built in 1799 and former home of the Barrett family (this house is now under restoration); the **Cast Iron Hospital**, a naval hospital in Port Royal, built in 1817 to treat injuries incurred in sea battles on nearby waters; and the **Town House Restaurant** in Montego Bay, maintaining its old-world charm amid the hustle and bustle of a modern city street.

Devon House is a great example of **Jamaican-Georgian architecture**, where the elegance of Georgian styling is married with functional features designed to weather the tropical climate. Set among expansive and meticulously landscaped gardens on Hope Road in Kingston, this 19th-century colonial mansion was originally owned and built by George Stiebel, Jamaica's first Black millionaire. Now restored, the majestic

great house contains the largest collection of Jamaican colonial period furniture, including fine reproductions of many household items.

The Ward Theatre in Kingston is the oldest theater of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean, and a great testament to Jamaican architecture and philanthropy. It was presented in 1912 by Colonel C.J. Ward as a gift to the city of Kingston. The architect, Rudolph Henriques, was a noted artist whose firm, Henriques and Sons, was awarded the £9,000 commission after winning a competition for best design. Declared a national monument on January 7, 2000, The Ward Theatre has a long history encompassing the nation's social, cultural and political lives. Distinguishing features include a domed ceiling, box seats and fly tower.

The Mandeville Courthouse in Mandeville is another prime example of Jamaican-Georgian Architecture. Built by slaves in 1820 with limestone blocks, the courthouse is one of only four original public buildings in Mandeville and has a portico supported by Doric columns flanked by a curving double staircase.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Beautifully designed interiors all over the island make a big impact, and range in mood from serene and soothing to upbeat and energizing. At **Round Hill Hotel & Villas** in Montego Bay, each villa is uniquely styled with an individual theme and color story. The elegant cocktail bar here was designed by Ralph Lauren in crisp navy and white that makes a bold statement against the vibrant aqua tones of the surrounding ocean.

For a complete change of pace, **Strawberry Hill Resort** in the Blue Mountains, near Kingston, is almost ethereal in ambience, with creamy white walls and rich wood tones accented by island cottons on the upholstered furniture. Its quiet elegance is gently soothing, making this the perfect retreat from city life and an ideal environment for reflection and creative thinking.

Similarly calming is the ambience of **Silent Waters**, an Indonesian-style retreat 700 feet (213 meters) above sea level with enthralling views across forested mountains

and cooling waterways. The reflective mood is enhanced by Asian art and décor, and the expansiveness of the architectural styling removes any barriers between indoor and outdoor living.

Asian influences set the scene also at **Tensing Pen**, a 16-unit resort near Montego Bay, designed for natural cooling by the breeze off the ocean. Natural woods and bamboo add warm tones to the crisp white of the draperies. Nearby, a property called **The Caves** offers seclusion and privacy in a complex of individually styled villas carved into a cliffside. A spa treatment room seems to be suspended over the sea below, and private dinners are organized by candlelight in a natural cave.

The original décor at **Jake's**, in Treasure Beach, gives this relaxed resort a sense of fun and adventure. Designed by Sally Henzell, whose talent as a theatrical set designer is spectacularly apparent in the unique styling of each villa, this property has a distinctly Moroccan feel. Brightly colored glass is embedded in pink and blue stucco walls; wood, tile and tin feature in the tactile surfaces; fabrics and artwork are used to create an energizing yet mystical ambience; and shower stalls are open to the sea and sun for a sensation of outdoor living.

Elegance comes with Caribbean color at **The Ritz-Carlton** in Montego Bay, with luxurious fabric combinations in the guestrooms and colonial grandeur in the expansive public areas. At the company's **White Witch Golf Club**, the restaurant is designed in the round, high above the sea, with brilliantly hued table settings in counterpoint to the cool whites of the stonework.

An extraordinary dining setting is on **The M/Y Zein** yacht owned by **The Grand Lido** in Negril. A private breakfast in the wood-paneled dining room aboard this opulently styled vessel is an unforgettable event.

Maximizing on the spectacular seascape, **Jamaica Inn** in Ocho Rios extends its blue-and-white décor to the outdoors, using oversized upholstered sofas and deep club chairs to turn guestroom terraces into outdoor living rooms.

HOME AND GARDEN

Many gardens in Jamaica offer cool respite on a hot day, and have been beautifully landscaped to showcase the island's colorful flora and, in some cases, to offer a base for stunning ocean views.

The Royal Botanical Gardens, commonly called **Hope Gardens**, offer the largest public green space in the West Indies, and are home to Jamaica's most popular collection of endemic and exotic botanic collections. The wide array of beautiful and rare species of tropical plants and trees here includes the *hibiscus elatus* (Blue Mahoe), the National Tree of Jamaica. The gardens stretch across more than 200 acres of land in the Liguanea Plains. In 1881, the Jamaican Government purchased the land to establish an experimental garden. Also worth a visit are **Bath Botanic Gardens** in St. Thomas, **Cinchona** in St. Andrew, **Cranbrook Flower Forest** in Ocho Rios and **Shaw Park Gardens**, also in Ocho Rios. **Coyaba River Garden & Museum** in Ocho Rios features Jamaican-Spanish architecture and a water garden fed by streams.

FASHION

The energy and color of Jamaica's upbeat lifestyle are strong influences on the hip new fashion scene shaped by a generation of young designers who are now making a mark on mainstream fashion.

Reggae superstars, like Sean Paul, have become fashion icons, and don the gold, green and black colors of the Jamaican flag in paying homage to their roots. The sportswear company, PUMA, has created a special line for the athletes of Jamaica, using these colors and making a bold statement with "must-have" appeal for sport and non-sport fashion urbanistas alike. A hot new designer, Michelle Simone Clarke, designer of House of Siim, has added stylish new cuts to Caribbean casual, creating a look that is at once chic through the heat of the day and elegantly cool when the evening calls for sophistication.

###